Primo Uomo

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Primo Uomo

by costumesofhannibal

Summary

When Will Graham arrives at the Paris Opera, he soon finds himself under the tutelage of a mysterious benefactor. Little does he know that its the Phantom of the Opera himself, the feared Hannibal Lecter.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will Graham slowly approached the Palais Garnier, home of the Paris Opera, his few possessions tucked away in a canvas bundle. After days of travel, he was finally here.

After his father's death, he'd spent some time singing at various country fairs. As luck would have it, he caught the eye of Margot Verger, the daughter of the Comte Verger. Apparently, her family were patrons of the Paris Opera, and impressed by Will's voice, encouraged him to travel to Paris. She assured him that with a mere mention of her name, they would certainly find a position for him.

Will stood there, gazing at the building. It was even more magnificent than Will had ever imagined. The grand marble columns stood above stone archways guarded by statues. On the roof stood gold statues of winged angels exalting the heavens. He swallowed. If only his father was here. When his father was alive, he'd always talked of visiting the Paris Opera, even joked about Will singing on the stage. Now, that mere dream seemed a possibility.

With a sharp intake of breath, Will summoned his courage and entered the Palais Garnier. The inside was just as grand as the exterior. The main room was huge, the ceiling several stories high, surrounded by marble balconies, looking down. In front of Will stood a huge white marble staircase, complete with carved balustrades. Tall intricately carved columns surrounded him, separated by archways, gold leaf and colored marble abound. Candelabras and crystal chandeliers outfitted with the new electric lights illuminated the beautiful paintings that covered the ceiling.

"I've managed this opera house for the last twenty years." A woman's voice broke Will out of his reverie. She spoke in slow, deliberate tones, but the tension in her voice was clear. "And this is how you replace me? I arrive one day and find out I've been fired?" Her voice came from somewhere at the top of the staircase.

"The patrons feel the opera house is in need of new life, new direction." A deep man's voice replied.

"*A new direction."* The woman scoffed. "You mean Mason Verger's *daddy* wants his son as primo uomo."

"*Comte* Verger is paying the operating expenses for the next two years. Now, I must get back to work. Your belongings are with the porter. I trust you can see yourself out."

"Yes." The woman bit back. Then, with a faux cheery tone, she added, "I wish you the best of luck. I am sure you'll find it more *difficult* than expected."

Will heard the sound of clicking heels descending the staircase. Looking up, he saw a woman, in her late 40's. She was strikingly beautiful, in a cold, precise way. Her hair was

blonde, and pinned up in an elaborate hairdo. She wore a dark blue dress, trimmed with black lace, which, while Will recognized as several years out of date, was in perfect condition. As she approached the bottom of the staircase, she noticed Will. She raised a thin eyebrow.

“Hello?” Will cautiously asked, feeling somewhat awkward about overhearing such a private conversation. “I’m here to see Bedelia Du Maurier, the manager…” he said weakly, quickly realizing that she mostly likely was Madame Du Maurier.

The woman scoffed. “Speaking. Though, as of,” she pulled out an intricately engraved gold pocket watch, “15 minutes ago, I am no longer the manager.” She slowly appraised Will, clearly taking in his worn clothing and burlap sack. “What manner of business brings you here?”

“I’m Will Graham, Mademoiselle Verger sent me, that I could get a job…” He weakly broke off, realizing how awkward this topic was.

At Verger’s name, Madame Du Maurier stiffened, and looked at him with this strange look of pity and distain. “Yes, well, you will find the new manager, Monsuier Crawford, upstairs. Office is to the right.”

“Thank you Madame.” Will bowed his head in thanks, before turning to scurry off up the huge staircase. On the right, he approached a large wooden door. Taking a deep breath, he knocked.

“What do you want now?!” A voice barked.

Will hesitates, before slowly opening the door, and walking in. In front of him, behind an imposing carved wooden desk, sat a large black man. He wore a fine suit, and displayed an air of commanding confidence. Yet, Will could tell, storm clouds hovered over the man’s mood.

“Monsieur Crawford?” Will spoke. “I’m Will Graham. Mademoiselle Verger sent me. She recommended me for a job, and mentioned that her brother could tutor my voice.”

“Mason!” Crawford barked.

Emerging from a side room, the grand primo uomo Mason Verger strode out. He wore a plush white fur coat, even though it was early fall, and the weather was no where near cold enough. His hair, like the rest of his clothing, was flamboyantly cut. Mason Verger took a seat, perched on the side of Crawford’s desk. Crossing his legs, he drawled, “What is it?”

“Your sister sent someone for singing lessons.”

Mason turned, reluctantly appraising Will. Sighing, he said, “Well, I do need a new assistant. Still no word from Froideveaux?”

Crawford shook his head. “No, nothing. He just up and left.”

Mason snarled. “You’d think that after all I’ve done for him, he’d have the grace to at least tell me he was quitting.” Mason turned back to Will. “Do you want the job or not?”

Will emphatically nodded. “Thank you, Monsieur Verger, thank you.” While this wasn’t exactly what he thought would happen, he was still grateful. *If I do a good job, maybe I can work my way up to the chorus.*

“That’s *Viscomte.* Jimmy Price can walk you through what’s expected.”

“Thank you Viscomte Verger.” Will replied, but Mason Verger had already turned to Crawford and started talking about some new production.

Realizing he’d been dismissed, Will backed out of the office, and made his way back downstairs.

To his surprise, Mdm. Du Maurier was still there, perusing several boxes of what Will assumed were her belongings. Reluctantly, he approached. “Do you know where Jimmy Price is?”

Not looking up, she replied, “He’s backstage.” She glanced in his direction. “Where are you staying?”

“Uh…” Will hadn’t planned that far. “I figure I’ll find a room nearby. There have to be places to rent?” Rent with what money, Will didn’t know. He’d spent almost all his money just *getting* to Paris.

Mdm. Du Maurier pursed her lips, and shook her head. “Come with me.” Leaving her boxes, she led him into the back offices, and through them, a side door that lead backstage. They moved quickly, like she didn’t want to be seen. Entering a large prop room, she flicked on the electric lights. Large set pieces from all sorts of productions, masks, chairs, even part of a papier-mâché elephant stood in the room. Taking a lantern from the wall, she lit it, and gestured for Will to follow her to the back of the room. Behind a dusty set of Japanese screens, was a door. Opening the door, she started down a spiral set of stone stairs.

She passed the first door, and continued down another flight. Will felt a chill as they descended. The walls, like the floor were made of stone. Reaching the second landing, she pulled out a keychain.

Will inclined his head curiously, looking at the staircase that continued down.

Noticing, Mdm Du Maurier tensed. “Don’t go past this level. It hasn’t been refurbished in years. God knows how dangerous it is.”

Will nodded.

She opened the door, and entered. The room was pitch black, the only light coming from the lantern in her hand. “It’s the extra prop room. No one comes down here.” She let out a low laugh. “I doubt most even know it exists.”

Will sneezed, noticing a thick layer of dust covering every surface. In the far corner was a bed, a leftover from some production or another. Yet, it looked like someone had once turned the room into a makeshift bedroom. Someone had propped up a tall mirror, and there was a

cabinet, amidst the production detritus. “Who stayed here before?” Will found himself asking.

“I used it, years ago, before I could afford a place nearby. Here are the keys.” Mdm. Du Maurier handed him the heavy keychain. Will eyed her curiously, as the keychain contained many keys. She shrugged. “It’s not like I need them anymore.”

“Are you sure?” Will looked at her.

In the lamplight, he could just make out a flicker of amusement. “What are they going to do? Fire me?”

Will had chuckle at that.

She handed him the lantern. “There’s extra lantern oil over there. You’ll want to get some candles.” With that she turned and walked out, leaving Will alone in the dark room.

Chapter End Notes

I saw the 1990 Phantom of the Opera the other day, the one with Charles Dance as the Phantom (Papa Lannister) and had to do this AU. Charles Dance is freaking amazing in the role. You can find it on youtube.

Thank you for reading! What are your thoughts so far?

Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The sound of splashing water caused Hannibal Lecter to stop, and look up from his musical sheets. Down, deep in the catacombs under the Paris Opera, he dwelled. It was his sanctuary, the only place he had ever called home. He lived on the other side of the underground lake, behind velvet and silk curtains, and within slabs of painted set backgrounds. A staircase lead to an upstairs bedroom, downstairs held a small kitchen and his music studio. Two large statues flanked the entrance, they're formerly bright colors faded, and peeling in the damp underground.

He sat in front of a large organ, transporting it down into the catacombs proved quite the challenge. Sheets of music were spread out in front of him, as he annotated them while composing.

It was the sound of an approaching boat. Only Bedelia knew where to find him. Only Bedelia could travers the maze of traps and emerge uninjured.

He turned. A pair of dark blue shear silk curtains were pulled back, revealing the lake, and Bedelia skillfully rowing across on a gondola. Despite wearing a midnight blue dress of silk taffeta, she did not appear to even break a sweat. Reaching the shore, she gracefully stepped out of the boat, revealing a pair of black leather boots.

Before he could acknowledge her presence, she spoke. "Foideveaux?" Was that necessary?"

Hannibal frowned, and rose from his red velvet piano bench. "He came down here. He saw me. You know what that means."

She pressed her red lips together, in that disapproving manner she often used. "Hannibal, you must be more careful. You can't just kill—"

He refrained from exhaling in annoyance. "As manager, that's *your* problem." If she didn't want things to happen to the staff, it was her duty to keep them from wandering into his halls!

"I'm leaving, Hannibal."

"What?" He tilted his head in confusion.

"I'm leaving the Opera house."

Anger started to swell up inside him. How could she just leave? Ever since she rescued him, all those years ago, from that jeering circus, she was all he knew. She knew that! Did all these years mean nothing? His eyes glinted dangerously.

"I was fired." She added, frowning.

The Vergers, Hannibal glowered. Ever since the senior Verger took an interest in the Opera, basically buying it with his donations, the Opera had taken a very different tone. He supposed it was only logical that the Vergers would replace Bedelia with someone of their own choice, someone loyal to them.

“I can no longer protect you.” She finished.

“I don’t need protection. I’m not a little boy.” He snapped. She might have rescued him when he was a merely a child, but over the years, her guidance had turned into a partnership. Together they had made this theater successful. He had picked out each season’s repertoire, even had input on casting and hiring. They’d even overseen the furnishing of the new electric lights!

“I know.” She replied, a touch of sadness in her voice.

“And I cannot come with you.” He stated flatly. How could he leave this tomb? He couldn’t show his face.

She nodded sadly.

He supposed, deep down, he’d always known this day would come. That eventually, she would have to leave, and he would have to forge his own way in the dark dungeons below. Finally, he spoke, “I see how it is, how it is meant to be.” He turned away to busy himself tidying his music notes, dismissing her. Dwelling on this would achieve nothing. He started planning his letter to the new manager. He would have to act swiftly, force this manager under his control. Then, he would see to removing that monstrosity of a Primo Uomo, Mason Verger.

He could feel Bedelia’s gaze shift, away from him, and the rustling of her skirts, like crinkling paper. He glanced back, for one final look, to see her stepping back into the boat. She pushed off. “Goodbye, Hannibal, goodbye.” With that, she drifted out into the dark lake, into the distance, leaving Hannibal alone on the shore.

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The job as Mason’s assistant wasn’t what Will expected. He’d spent the day under the stern, exacting eye of Jimmy Price, an older, thin man, weary with life, and who Will suspected was an alcoholic. In fact, the only time Will saw the man smile was when he was in the company of Brian Zeller, one of the stage hands, and Beverly Katz, the lead ballerina.

As his first job, Will was to assist Price in cleaning out the costuming department. Mason seemed to have an infinite number of wigs and doublets, and whoever this Froideveaux was, he sure was a poor assistant. Many of Mason’s costumes were in questionable condition and needed repair.

The costume closet was grander than its name. It was actually a medium sized room, crammed packed with racks of garments. It was almost claustrophobic, with dense racks of beaded gowns and embroidered capes. Boxes of feathered hats, paste jewelry, and even the

odd crystal knob cane were stacked high, almost precariously. There was very little room to maneuver.

Will hummed to himself as he piled yet another set of damaged sequined pantaloons aside to repair.

“Will? Will Graham, is that you?”

Will stopped humming as he heard a woman’s voice in the doorway. He turned, and saw a slender woman with deep brown hair, softly pinned up, standing in the doorway. She wore a dress, in the latest fashion, its layers of fabric and bustle a myriad of soft blue stripes. There was something familiar about her face, something that reminded him of happier days…

Seeing him, her blue eyes lit up with recognition. “Will! It’s me, Alana!”

That’s who it was! How could he forget? When had they last seen each other? They must have been 13 or 14 when they last spoke.

Alana stepped forward to embrace him, sidestepping a box of silk ribbons but stopped short, glancing him up and down. Glancing down at his well worn pants and loose, threadbare shirt, he felt painfully self-conscious.

“What are you doing here?” Will stiffly replied, taking a step back.

“I’m the Prima Donna!” She exclaimed, laughing. “What are you doing here?”

“Mademoiselle Bloom!” He realized he never knew Alana’s full name. Her family had owned a summer cottage on the coast near where Will and his parents used to live. They’d spent many a summer running along the beach, exploring nearby caves, and singing while Will’s father played the violin. Then, one year, his mother had died, and his father lost his job, and they had to sell the house…

“You mean Alana,” She looked at him reproachfully. “Or should I say ‘lana? Your little ‘lana?” She blushed.

He shuffled his feet awkwardly, looking away, unable to maintain eye contact. It was clear that their lives had taken them in drastically different directions, with very different fortunes. How could he tell her that he’d spent the last few years with his father in ignominy, performing at county fairs for enough coins to survive?

“How’d you know it was me?” He asked.

“I’d recognize your voice anywhere. That song you were humming, it was always a favorite of mine. Your father would play it often when I visited.”

Will murmured in remembrance, sitting around the warm fire, his father playing the violin, the two of them singing, his mother bringing freshly baked muffins…

“But you still haven’t answered my question.” Alana smiled. “What are you doing in the costume closet?”

Will remained expressionless, not wanting to say something impolitic. “Mademoiselle Verger, she heard me sing—“

Alana cut him off, “Oh! You’re the little angel Margot won’t stop talking about!” She tossed her head back, laughing. Seeing his complete embarrassment, she tried to compose herself, failed and laughed again. Then she frowned. “But what are you doing in here? I didn’t see you in the chorus today.”

“I’m Mason Verger’s new assistant.”

Alana’s frown deepened. “Margot didn’t say anything about that. She said you were to—never mind. She’s out of Paris until the start of the season. But when I see her—“

“Please don’t!” Will replied, a little more forceful than planned.

Alana raised an eyebrow.

“I mean, I don’t want to cause trouble.” Will fully realized how lucky he was to have this opportunity. The last thing he wanted was to be seen as a troublemaker, or worse still, seen as relying solely on the power of a patron, not for his own talents and hard work.

Understanding mixed with concern flooded Alana’s eyes. “Just know, if Mason gives you any trouble, you must come see me.”

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Exhausted, Will collapsed on the bed. He’d used what few coins he had left to purchase some candles. Economically, he lit only one, which stood in a brass holder he’d found on a table in the far corner of the room.

For the first time since his arrival, he started to sing. His tenor voice rang out, pure and clear. Peace and comfort filled his chest as he sang, a warm blanket of security.

Suddenly, a voice joined in, echoing around the cold stone room. The voice was powerful, pure, full of depth and mystery. Will momentarily stopped, but the voice continued. He glanced around, but couldn’t figure out where the voice was coming from. It seemed to come from no where and everywhere at once. Inspired, Will returned to singing.

Together, they finished the song, reaching a wonderful crescendo. The aria finished, Will called out. “Hello? Where are you?”

Silence.

“Where are you?” Will repeated, taking the candle holder and walking around the room, checking for another door. But the walls were made of solid stone. “Who are you?” Will called.

Silence.

Standing in the empty room, Will thought on one last place to check, opening the stairwell door. Standing on the landing, he glanced up and down the circular staircase, straining to hear the sound of retreating footsteps echoing on the stone stairs.

Silence.

He found himself looking down the staircase, towards the depths below, the light from his candle seemingly swallowed up by the dark stone surrounding him. But, remembering Mme. Du Maurier's warning, he retreated, closing the door to his room. He took care to lock it before going to sleep for the night.

***

"I'll stay and finish cleaning up." Will volunteered to Jimmy Price, picking up a broom, and ignoring his hurting feet.

Price nodded, clearly relieved to leave. "See you tomorrow. Remember to turn off the lights."

With that, the last member of the corps left, leaving Will backstage, alone with half painted sets and ladders. Ropes hung from the catwalks above, like vines in a jungle. Long shadows, cast by painted backdrops, hung over the wooden floor.

Organizing the costume collection was proving a far more daunting task than initially expected. To make matters worse, that day Mason seemed in particularly poor temper, going as far as to viciously kick Brian Zeller. Zeller had the misfortune to trip, almost splattering green paint on the Primo Uomo. It had taken both Jimmy Price and Alana Bloom, to pull Mason off Zeller's curled up form. Since then, Will vowed to just keep his head down, and try his best to please the volatile star. Surely if he performed his duties well, he might achieve that position in the chorus Mademoiselle Verger told him about.

Sweeping up the last of the stage debris, Will found himself standing in the wings, looking out onto the huge stage. He propped the broom against the wall, and found himself walking out onto the smooth wooden stage. He could barely contain the rush that flowed through him. Here he was, on the stage of the Paris Opera, just like his father had wanted. Looking past the pulled back red and gold curtains, Will marveled at the view, at the sea of red velvet seats. The entire auditorium was painted gold, with intricately carved balconies separating the four tiers of seating. Private boxes lined the sides. Above was an imposing domed ceiling, painted with brightly colored, impressionistic winged creatures and dancing figures. A gigantic crystal chandelier hung suspended in the center, sparkling with electric lights.

Overcome, he started to sing.

As he sung, in his mind's eye he saw the theater full of an audience in rapture. He felt the heat of the stage lights shining brightly on him. He could just make out his father sitting in the front row, smiling proudly.

Closing his eyes, he finished the sweeping melody, and nearly jumped when he heard someone clapping.

“Bravo, bravo.” A sonorous voice spoke from somewhere out of view.

Caught, Will hastily stepped back, starting to retreat backstage.

“Wait.” The voice commanded. It was firm, with a sense of cool authority.

Freezing, Will hesitantly waited.

A tall figure emerged from the orchestra pit. He wore a crisp white shirt, with a white cravat and fashionably cut black jacket, which showed off his lean, masculine figure. A black cape with a snow white lining hung around his shoulders. Yet, perhaps the most striking thing about him was the porcelain white mask that covered his entire face except for his mouth, exposing a pair of patrician lips.

“Your voice,” the man started. “I fear mere words cannot describe it.”

Will stood there, taken aback by the strange man’s appearance, completely unsure what to say, or how to even react.

The man continued, “Yet, it is unfinished, like a diamond, freshly mined. With the correct cut and polish, it could rival the Koh-i-noor itself.”

At that, Will couldn’t help but let out a sarcastic chuckle. He’d been told his voice was good, but it wasn’t *that* good. “Who are you?” He found himself asking the mysterious man.

The man ignored the question. “What you need is a tutor. Someone to take your voice, and raise it to the heights it belongs.” With a quirk of his lips, the man added, “I am willing to be that tutor.”

“I still don’t know who you are.” Will skeptically replied.

The slightest slip of a smile. “Consider me, a benefactor. And your tutor if you would grant me the privilege, for it is privilege to hear such a voice.”

Will couldn’t help but feel a rush of blood to his cheeks. “…Thank you,” he stammered out again. He wasn’t sure what to say. “I’d be honored to have you as my teacher.” He felt a thrill of excitement. Despite Mademoiselle Verger’s word, he had yet to receive *any* lessons from her brother. Finally, could get what he came to Paris for.

The man’s lips broke into a genuine smile, but it disappeared as quickly as it arrived. “You must promise me one thing.”

“Yes, of course!” Will eagerly replied.

“You must never tell anyone of my existence.”

Will furrowed his brow quizzically.

“I am a very private individual. If word escaped that I took a pupil, I would quickly become swarmed with other *less worthy candidates.*” He spoke the words with distain. Then, lighting

up, he added, “And then, when would I have time to compose?”

Will nodded. The mysterious man was also a composer! Will wondered if he’d heard any of his work, or even sung any of it.

The man’s lips formed a thin, tight line. “And, you wouldn’t want other to become jealous, would you?”

Will nodded in understanding. “Of course, I understand.” He hadn’t seen much of Mason, but he saw enough to know he did not want to draw the man’s ire or attention. Mason seemed downright temperamental at best, and outright cruel at worst.

The man looked pleased. “There’s a practice room off the first floor back corridor. I shall see you there this time, tomorrow night.” He turned and started back down into the orchestra pit.

“Wait!” Will called out, stepping forward. “I don’t know your name!” But when Will looked down into the pit, it was empty.

Chapter End Notes

Author's note/disclaimer:

I'm trying a different writing style with this story than my main story, The Long Death of Hannibal Lecter. (Which I highly recommend you check out, it's a bit of a slow start, but it picks up) This story is also just me, and not undergoing the lengthy editing/co-writing like the other story. I'm more or less writing this and seeing where it takes me. I have a very loose outline, but I'm not sure how the story ends yet. So uh, maybe these are good, or bad things. :P

Also, I'm afraid I have to admit I don't know a lot about Opera. I enjoy listening to some of it, but I don't have any great depth of knowledge. If anyone can point me towards some good operas or arias that might thematically work, please let me know! :D

Thank you so much for reading!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next day couldn't go by fast enough. Will raced through his chores, yet organizing the costume closet seemed like an endless task. Mason now wanted him to repair the damaged costumes! Mason even said it with a smirk, like he expected Will to fail. Will was glad that he'd learned some basics from his mother, yet even then, most of the evening was gone, and he was no where near re-trimming a pair of sparkling silver pantaloons.

The clock chimed, signaling midnight, and Will realized he was running late. He hastily folded the last of the pantaloons, and dashed for the practice rom.

He tossed open the door to find, an intimate room, illusionary larger with a mirror along one wall, and a piano along the other. A long window sat high up off the ground, but as it was night, the sole source of light came from a single candelabra resting on top of the glossy black piano.

Sitting at the piano, rested the mysterious man, his black cape hanging loosely around his shoulders, shrouding his person in a blanket of darkness. As the door opened, the man turned, his stark white porcelain mask catching the candle light. Before the man could open his mouth, Will started apologizing profusely.

The man cut him off with a decisive wave of his white gloved hand. "As long as it does not become a habit. I trust *Mason* is keeping you busy?" He said the primo uomo's name like a particularly distasteful fish.

Will nodded. "How did you—"

The man scoffed, an amused smile playing at the corner of his lips. "There are few things that happen within these walls that I do *not* know about. Now," he turned to a folder on the piano and removed several sheets of music. "Are you able to read this?" He passed the papers to Will.

Looking down at the sheet music for *Les pêcheurs de perles*. Will nodded, recognizing the upcoming season's opera, a tale of two close friends eternal friendship threatened by the love for the same woman. "My father taught me."

"Good." The man said curtly. "That simplifies matters. Now to start with some scales…"

***

Will felt like he was flying. Soaring, high upon the heavens, life and humanity a distant, faded reality. He hadn't felt like this since before his father died, no, even possibly long before that. In the last few years together, there was the shadow of poverty, ever looming

over them. As much as singing became a refuge, it was hard to truly enjoy the music when one worried about where the next source of food would come from.

Will slowly descended back onto earth as he finished the aria. The man applauded. “Perfect.”

Will beamed. He’d lost count of the number of times they’d tried that song, each time his tutor stopping him, and having him try a section again, perfecting a note or two. Looking up, he noticed the soft glow of the early morning dawn peaking in through the window.

“Oh, we’ve forgotten the time!” He exclaimed.

The man’s eyes flicked towards the window, as if noticing for the first time as well. “So it appears. We shall have to be more careful in the future.” He rose from the piano bench to leave. “Tomorrow evening?”

Will nodded, still in a hazy glow left from the singing.

The man’s black cape swept behind him as he strode towards the door.

“Wait, what do I call you?”

The man stopped, and tilted his head in thought. “Maestro will do.”

“Thank you Maestro.” Will broke into a large smile. “Thank you.”

***

The next couple weeks passed in a happy haze for Will. They never stayed up as late as they did the first night, but on the nights when he did not have work the next morning, he and Maestro would spend hours singing and even just talking about music. He’d learned that Maestro liked Handel, detested Massenet, and considered Chabrier to be little more than a hack. Under Maestro’s tutelage, his voice quickly adapted to the higher notes.

As Will pushed a large bin filled with discarded costumes backstage, he saw Beverly, Price, and Zeller huddled off to the side.

“What did Jack do?” He heard Beverly whisper as he approached.

“What do you think he did?” Price muttered back. “He tore the letter up. Said he wasn’t going to take orders from some anonymous ghost.”

“Shit,” Beverly swore. As Will approached, the three quickly dispersed.

***

As Will crossed the main foyer, he heard the sound of a door open and slam closed.

“WHAT IN GOD’S NAME!”

Will jumped as he heard Crawford start shouting from upstairs. He tore up the stairs to Crawford's office. He didn't have to knock, Crawford open the door, and slammed it closed behind him, sweat perspiring from his forehead.

"What are you doing boy! Fetch the police!"

Bewildered, Will turned to follow orders.

By the time Will had returned, Crawford had composed himself, and was silently waiting outside his door.

"Inspector Fredrick Chilton." The officer Will brought introduced himself. He was a tiny man, with a dark little beard, and generally pompous demeanor. He wore a blue police uniform, with shiny brass buttons, and an imperious expression that suggested he did not appreciate wasted time.

"Jack Crawford, manager of the Paris Opera. No one has been in or out. I didn't want anyone to contaminate the crime scene."

"Crime scene? This young man did not mention what, *exactly* I'm here for."

Jack cast an annoyed glance at Will, who looked back with utter confusion.

"Someone, murdered Franklyn Froideveaux and placed his body in my chair!" Jack threw open the door to his office confidently, and stepped back.

Inside his office, opposite the door was Jack's large wooden desk. Behind it sat his imposing green leather chair, with brass studding. It was empty. Will and Inspector Chilton exchanged glances.

Many minutes later…

"And you say you are *sure* you saw Mssr. Froideveaux?" The Inspector Chilton drawled skeptically.

"He was right here dammit!" Crawford swore, gesturing towards his empty office chair. "In *my* office chair!"

"Monsieur, there is no need to shout."

"His head was almost detached, his chest cavity split in two."

The inspector looked at Crawford with that sad, humoring look reserved for people's aging grandparents. Rising, he reached out to shake Crawford's hand, and said, "Well, we will be in touch."

"You can't just leave!" Crawford exclaimed.

"Sir, there is no body, no blood, no sign of a body. By your own admission, no one entered or exited the office."

“I know what I saw.” Crawford growled.

“I have no doubt you believe so.” Inspector Chilton said sadly.

Will followed Inspector Chilton out, leaving a dejected Crawford to move furniture around, getting himself a new chair.

As he exited the office, he saw Beverly, Price, and Zeller huddled to the side, eyeing the inspector warily. Will went to join them.

“I knew this would happen.” Price shook his head sadly. “You don’t just ignore the phantom.”

“Phantom?” Will innocently asked.

They all exchanged wary glances. Zeller coughed nervously. “They say the theater is haunted —“

“No ‘they say’,” Price cut in, “*It is*. I’ve been here long enough, strange sounds at night, music, creaking, the occasional ‘accident’. Unless Crawford does what the phantom wants, there will be more like this.”

***

The weeks passed, and Will learned the part of Nadir, the young fisherman. Maestro would sing the role of Zurga, Nadir’s long lost friend. Will marveled at Maestro’s voice, a deep, rich, baritone, that otherworldly voice that sang with him his first night at the opera. Their voices flowed together, playing off each other.

Yet, there were moments when Will felt there was something more. A shared glance, a pause for just too long, the projection of a note. A deeper shared connection. But he pushed it out of his mind. He was clearly imagining things. Even if he were to entertain such foolish notions, why would someone as successful and brilliant as Maestro find him interesting? Maestro was merely tutoring him, seeing potential in his voice, and he was thankful. He would do nothing to endanger that relationship.

As Will finished *À cette voix...Je crois entendre,* Maestro closed the lid on the piano keyboard with finality. The soft candlelight flickered off the brightly polished surface of the man’s mask, the only visible parts of his face were his mouth and eyes.

“Have I displeased you?” Will asked, eyes filled with concern.

“On the contrary,” Maestro’s smooth voice started, “There is little more I can teach you. I believe you are ready.”

Will couldn’t help but laugh. He’d noticed that sometimes Maestro had a sometimes strange and perverse sense of humor. Noticing the lack of a smile at Maestro’s lips, Will froze. “… You’re serious?”

“I do not joke about such matters.” His teacher responded briskly. “I believe you are ready for the public.”

Will couldn’t believe his ears. “What public? I’m not even in the chorus! I run Mason’s errands! I doubt Jack Crawford will even listen to me.” Will hoped he didn’t sound too bitter.

“Talent like yours will not go undiscovered for long.” Maestro reassured. “When an opportunity presents itself, you must merely seize the moment.”

***

Days later, that opportunity came, in a crash, crunch of blood and bone, and a man’s screams. Will gaped as a large wooden set of the temple stairs fell onto the stage, onto Mason’s understudy, Tobias Budge.

“Get it off him! Where is Zeller?!” Jack started shouting.

“He’s not here!” Price shouted back, checking the rafters.

“Dammit. Get a medic!” Jack yelled. From the wings, Will could see the twitching leg of Tobias Budge peaking out from underneath the heavy set.

After several excruciating minutes, they managed to winch the set off Tobias. But by then his screams had turned into whimpering moans, and then to low gurgling.

From the wings, Will looked over and felt a wave of nausea. Blood seeped everywhere. Tobias’ arms looked crushed.

By the time the medic arrived, the gurgling had stopped. Just deathly silence. The entire company stood there in horrified shock. Silently, the medics started to scoop the body up onto a stretcher. Covering it with a sheet, they walked out. A bloody puddle glistened on the wooden stage.

Finally, Jack broke the silence, looking particularly shaken. “It was an accident. Just an accident.” He repeated out loud.

Will had this strange feeling, one he couldn’t place, but he quickly suppressed it. Crawford was right. It clearly was just an accident.

A mop and bucket were thrust in Will’s direction, and the corps dispersed to try and find Zeller. There was a set to fix, a stage to clean, and preparations to be made. After all, tomorrow was opening night.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay on this story. I've mostly been working on the sequel to my main story, the long death of hannibal lecter. I encourage all of you to check it out! It's much more polished than this story, hahaha.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They found Zeller later that day, locked in a utility closet. He claimed he stepped inside to get a broom, and the door slammed shut behind him. He felt horrible, blaming himself for Tobias Burdge's death. While Jack didn't say anything, it was clear Jack blamed him too. Only Price and Beverly kept insisting that it wasn't Zeller's fault, and he'd been locked in the closet by this mysterious phantom.

Will thought it all terribly superstitions. It was clearly an accident, and no one was to blame.

***

It was opening night. "Where's Mason?" Price shouted backstage, "He's not in his dressing room—"

Screams and running footsteps jolted both of them towards the chorus girls dressing room. Half dressed women were fleeing the room, some throwing on robes or holding garments to hide their corsets. Behind them stumbled Mason Verger, exposing himself for all the world to see. Will was *not* impressed.

"Where are you all going?" Mason shouted, words slurring. He was visibly swaying, and giggling. "Don't you want to dance? Big-Verger wants to dance too!" He wiggled his hips suggestively.

"Oh *Jesus*." Price cringed and crossed himself as Will averted his eyes. "Zeller! Bring a blanket!"

It took three stagehands to restrain the gyrating Mason and bundle him back into his dressing room. By now, Jack Crawford had been alerted and he paced the backstage furiously, like an enraged lion, casting glares at anyone who dared venture close.

From beyond the closed curtains, Will could hear the bustling sounds of an audience starting to enter the theater.

"What do we do?" Jack repeated at Price. "Of all times for that…" he pursed his lips tightly instead of swearing, "to get drunk." He finished.

"He's never done this *before* a show, sir." Price replied, nervously.

"Do we have *anyone* who knows the part? The audience is here! I can't just issue refunds!"

"We don't have—" Price started, but Will cut him off.

"I do. I know the part." Not knowing why, Will heard himself speak. "I do. I know the part."

Jack growled, snapping his head in Will's direction. "Now's not the time to boost your ego lad."

"No," Will stood his ground, gaining confidence. "I know the part." He firmly replied. "I've practiced on my own."

Jack inhaled, but before he could let loose a tirade, Price cut him off. "What choice do we have? Didn't Viscountess Margot vouch for his voice? Worse case, it's a scandal. But, people will soon forget. Fire him, no one will care." Price tried to placate Jack.

"Really, sir. I know the part." Will eagerly replied. He could do this! This was just the opportunity Maestro had told him to seize!

"Fine." Jack gritted out. "Get him into Mason's costume. I'll delay the audience."

Price grabbed Will's arm and dragged him towards the dressing room. "I hope to God you know what you're doing." He hissed. "For all our sakes."

***

Hannibal smirked to himself as he headed toward Box 5. Removing Mason was an easy task. He'd injected drugs into the louts system, poured alcohol all over the room, and let the Opera corps draw its own conclusions. Even if Mason remembered getting drugged, who would believe him? The truth was so unbelievable, Mason's protests would be viewed as a desperate attempt to cover his outrageous behavior.

Hannibal entered Box 5, and frowned. Crawford couldn't even follow the most basic instruction, and leave it empty! He'd have to find another place to watch the Opera. And this he must see. He had faith that Will would not let him down.

***

The red curtain pulled back, and before him, the sea of the audience, mere shapes against the bright spot lights. And Will began to sing. Flying, soaring the heights of music, he felt *alive.* For the first time in his life, he felt right. This was where he belonged. This was home.

***

The applause was deafening. Will stood next to Alana Bloom absorbing the standing ovation. A wide, almost goofy grin spread across his face in joy. They bowed again, before retreating backstage. Will felt electric, like all the nerves in his system were full of energy, glowing. He couldn't wait to see Maestro, to discuss the performance. Ignoring his colleagues many shouts of 'We knew you could do it!' 'We always knew you had it in you!' Will made his way to Mason's dressing room to change out of the costume.

The room still reeked of alcohol, and Will ignored the couple discarded liquor bottles. Mason still lay unconscious on a chaise lounge, two stage hands hovering over him, ready to restrain him if the need occurred.

As Will finished changing out of Nadir's tunic, he heard a loud pounding on the dressing room door. Turning, he saw Viscountess Margot Verger and Alana Bloom enter. Alana wore a deep navy and white striped dress, cut in the latest fashion, and carried a large bouquet of red roses. Viscountess Verger was clad in a dress of the brightest red silk, full of pleats and gold trim.

"Will!" Viscountess Verger exclaimed. "I can't believe it! You were incredible!" She rushed over to embrace Will, her silk dress rustling across the floor. He awkwardly reciprocated. "I'll thank my brother later for your lessons, I'm so glad they made you understudy."

"Thank you, Viscountess." Will politely responded, confused. "None of this could have happened without you."

"Oh, call me Margot! None of this Viscountess business amongst friends." Margot paused, noticing the reek in the room for the first time. With a distasteful turn, she glanced at her brother. "Alana dear, I think it would be best if Mason retires to the country for a few months. Don't you agree? I shall speak to Jack immediately."

Alana nodded. A wide smile crossed Margot's face. "Will, Alana and I were just about to head out to dinner. You must join us. After all, you two are the stars of the evening!"

Will nodded, a heady feeling floating about him. First the high of the performance, now all this sudden attention. Before he could even respond, Alana took his arm, and started escorting him towards the door.

***

Dinner was exquisite. Duck, lamb, a variety of cheeses. There was more food in that one meal than Will had ever seen in a meal. It was so incredibly indulgent. The entire meal, Alana and Margot kept exchanging little glances, and the occasional touch on the arm. Will felt he was almost intruding on something intimate.

After more courses than Will could count, they went for a carriage ride.

"So, Will, how does it feel to be the new Primo Uomo?" Alana asked.

"What?" Will sharply responded.

"Jack didn't tell you?" Alana acted surprised. "I guess we did steal you away." She laughed, her laugh light like silver bells. "Well, with Mason *recuperating* they'll need a new star. And after tonight's performance, of course that would be *you*."

Will sat in shock. It was all happening so quickly.

"I look forward to working with you." Alana smiled coyly.

"And I to seeing you perform." Margot added, leaning in closer to Will.

The scent of lavender and roses permeated the air, Will momentarily distracted by Margot's perfume. Suddenly, Will noticed the pinkish glow in the sky. "What time is it?" He urgently

asked.

“I don’t know, far too late, or is it too early now?” Margot laughed, sliding an arm around Will.

He disentangled himself, “I’ve got to go. We’ve got to get back.” A look of urgent horror crossed his face. He’d completely forgotten about Maestro! Surely his tutor was waiting for him,

“Oh what’s another hour, if we wait long enough, we can get breakfast *Le Procope*, they have an exquisite—“

“I have to get back.” Will pulled away, tense.

Margot informed the driver.

“We’re not far. But surely, we can change your mind.” Alana smiled sweetly.

Will found himself momentarily torn. There was something intoxicating about their attention, a Viscountess and the Prima Donna herself! He had no idea why they were interested in him, awkward country boy he was. Suddenly, he felt sick. Their attention overwhelming. He just wanted the quiet peace he found with Maestro.

“No, I must go.” He firmly replied.

“There isn’t another woman,” Margot teased. “Is there?” She added more seriously.

“No! Of course not!” Will replied, scandalized that she’d think he’d act such a way over a mere romantic interest.

“Okay, ok.” Margot teased. “So, what’s so important?”

Will didn’t answer. As the carriage pulled in front of the Opera house, he positively leapt out, shouting goodbye over his shoulder, and tore off up the steps of the Opera house and to the practice room. Tossing the door open, he found the room empty. He collapsed on the floor beside the piano.

He was disappointed in himself, disappointed in Maestro, angry that he was disappointed. He supposed it had been too much to ask to think that Maestro would have waited up for him. After all, Maestro had a life as well, why should Will expect him to wait, like some love struck stage door admirer? No, Will’s actions that evening were beyond inconsiderate. This wasn’t just his success, this was Maestro’s triumph as well. He owed so much to the man, and this was how he repaid him? Surrounded by the glittering presence of Alana and Margot, he’d completely forgotten about his teacher.

Slowly rising, Will blotted back the tears. All he could do was hope that Maestro would forgive him.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Years Everyone! Thank you for all the support!

End Notes

I saw the 1990 Phantom of the Opera the other day, the one with Charles Dance as the Phantom (Papa Lannister) and had to do this AU. Charles Dance is freaking amazing in the role. You can find it on youtube.

Thank you for reading! What are your thoughts so far?

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!